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SERMON CLXI.

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THE LOVELINESS OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.

1 PETER, iii. 8.—*Love as brethren.*

Christianity, like its heavenly Author, is love. In the beautiful language of another, "Jesus Christ was an incarnation of love in our world. He was love, living, breathing, speaking, acting amongst men. His birth was the nativity of love, his sermons the words of love, his miracles the wonders of love, his tears the meltings of love, his crucifixion the agonies of love, his resurrection the triumph of love."

Christianity he has left behind him, as the representative of his character, the written image of himself, and has breathed into the whole system his own spirit, and rendered it living with love. This system is the system of the church, the system of every individual member of the brotherhood; and its breath of life it has infused into every heir of God, and joint heir with Jesus Christ, and made him a living soul, alive with the fervor of love. Hence the Bible every where recognizes it as characteristic of the disciples of Christ, and in a variety of manner, and with unvented frequency and emphasis, brings it into view as the invaluable and necessary possession of every Christian: "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love: and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." The objects of this affection are all perceptive beings, all capable of happiness. It embraces God, and clings to him supremely, as ineffably excellent, and infinitely superior in worth to all other beings: his holy angels also, as reflections of the brightness of his glory; and even his enemies it regards with benevolence, although not with approbation. But it has a peculiar operation in reference to all who are brethren of Christ, members of his body, and beautifully knits them together in love: To this exhibition of love, or this mode of its operation, the Apostle alludes, when he exhorts Christians in the text, to *love as brethren.*

I shall therefore take occasion from these words, to explain, briefly the nature, but principally the operation and effects of brotherly love.

I. Love is a complex emotion of the soul, the elements of which are, a pleasurable feeling awakened by the contemplation of some appropriate object, and a desire for the good of that object. Of this emotion there are

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various modification, expressed by different names; and there are, of course, different objects that will excite it, and variously modify its operation.

Other feelings, therefore, embraced under the general term, *love*, or nearly allied to it, may be mistaken for that peculiar affection, that bond of peace, which unites *Christians* in one body "fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, making increase of the body, to the edifying of itself in love."

It must not be supposed to consist in that *natural affection* existing among members of the same family, nor in that *amiable good nature*, which fills the breast with the milk of human kindness, and leads, as if by instinct, to acts of beneficence. Neither is it to be mistaken for *denominational attachment*, that which is felt for those who profess the same creed, and worship in the same mode with ourselves, nor for that *fond affection and cordial friendship*, which often bind, in sweet union, those who discover congeniality of temper, or have, by circumstances, become peculiarly intimate. It must be distinguished also, from that *benevolence*, which yearns over a dying world, and moves to vigorous efforts for its salvation.

These feelings will certainly exist in the heart of the *Christian*, in connexion with the love of the brethren, but may all be found, likewise, in a heart entirely destitute of the love of God: and therefore, although all combined in one lovely being, would constitute no sure proof of a renovated heart, or of preparation for heaven.

In distinction from all these, *brotherly love* is that which animates the bosoms of those who, in the Bible are denominated *the brethren*—it is their love for one another, as *Christians*, disciples of Christ. The Master himself has determined who are his brethren. Not those related to him by natural ties, but *they who hear the will of God and do it*. Christ speaking of his disciples, says, *One is your Master, and all ye are brethren*. Hence the Apostles, in writing to the churches, adopt this appellation, and address them as faithful brethren, the holy brethren, the brotherhood, and exhort them to love as brethren.

But they are constituted brethren by a moral bond; the same which binds them to Christ himself. There is among them a family likeness in moral qualities. And although there may be no other attractive influence, no connection between them in the relations of society, they have all drunk into one spirit; and whether high or low, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, African, Indian, American, bond or free, they feel themselves knit together in love, being of one accord, of one mind. Hence there is a sympathy pervading the whole; which manifests itself in weeping with those that weep, and rejoicing with them that do rejoice.

But let it be especially noted, that the object which in contemplation excites this emotion, is *moral likeness to Christ*. Wherever we discover the image of Jesus, or see a course of action which evinces the possession of his spirit, there will all the feelings cluster, which may be elements of brotherly love. Let me see an individual of any clime, of any color, of any sect, who, in his walk and conversation is manifestly governed by a regard for the Lord and his anointed, who is cultivating the heavenly dispositions, and holy habits of the gospel, who has embarked in the high interests in which God is engaged, and who sees and feels, loves and hates, as he does, and if I have any brotherly love in me, I see a man, who has higher claims on my regard, and my sympathy, than any of the merely natural relations of life can command. Loving him that begat,

I also love him that is begotten of him. Bound to the throne of God by those moral excellencies which brighten his character, and make him an object of delightful complacency, I am also bound in Christian affection to every son and daughter of Adam, who beholding the glory of God as it shines in the person of Jesus Christ, has been changed into the same image. And as he is the centre of attraction to them all, and they all alike love to sit at his feet, and imbibe his heavenly spirit, so also do they love to contemplate the faintest reflections of his glory wherever visible.

II. But the *effects of brotherly love, or its manner of operation*, is that which more especially interests us.

Since it is not sectarian, but affectionately embraces all who love Christ, and walk in his commandments, it will tenderly regard the feelings, and consult the spiritual benefit of those of other names than that by which itself is known. But as churches are now organized, and all in every place who call upon the name of God, are not associated in one community, it necessarily follows, that the operations of this affection will be generally manifested among those who believe and worship alike.

And while it is expansive as the length and breadth of the church universal, and sympathizes with every member, whose wants and sorrows are known, while it has an ear to hear, and a hand to relieve the miseries of a brother or sister in the most distant clime, it acts specially in reference to those more immediately under its eye, and within its reach.

I. Toward these it will operate in leading us to *avoid all occasions of offence*. It will be our endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and as the elect of God, holy and beloved, to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering. Oh! if these heavenly affections had a deeper lodgment in the breasts of those who are called the brethren of Christ, how much bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and evil speaking, and malice, would be put away from the midst of them—how tender would they be of each other's feeling—how kind in word and action—how careful lest even a momentary wound might be inflicted—and how watchful against every occasion of ill-feeling. Where there is real brotherly love in exercise, we shall look upon the least of Christ's disciples as dearer to him than the apple of his eye; and as we love him, we cannot offend any of those little ones who bear his image, and to offend whom would bring upon us a more fearful punishment than if a millstone were hanged about our neck, and we cast into the sea.

Cold looks, harsh words, careless and indifferent action toward the brethren, will therefore be avoided as adapted to give them pain. All that recklessness of the peace of others, which will not stop to calculate consequences, but says and does just as it pleases, must be banished from the breasts of the followers of Christ, and there must come into its place a determination rather to sacrifice our own peace, than for a moment interrupt that of a Christian brother.

2. It will operate, also, in *promoting forgiveness*. In consequence of remaining corruption in the children of God, the variety of natural disposition belonging to them, the different modes of education by which they have been trained, the distinctive classes of society in which they have moved, and the sinful readiness with which some take offence, there do too often occur among professed brethren, injurious speeches, and unwarrantable feelings. Yet these things ought not so to be. We must

forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us, and pray to be forgiven ourselves, as we forgive those who trespass against us. An unforgiving professor, therefore, who cherishes unkind, untender, revengeful feelings towards any brother, and yet daily offers up the Lord's prayer is imploring God to be revenged on him for his sins, to pardon him, as he pardons a trespassing brother—which is by taking vengeance. Oh! can this be the spirit of Jesus, who prayed for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Ah! no. If we be the disciples of Christ, we shall be like him, filled with love, and unwilling for a moment to harbor one feeling of enmity against a fellow Christian. Whenever we suppose ourselves to be maltreated, instead of suffering the imagination to play, and augment a molehill into a mountain, a little rivulet over which we might easily step, into a mighty ocean which it will require weeks, or months, or years to traverse, let us at once discover whether there be any just cause of offence; and if there be, where brotherly love exists, the offender will readily confess his fault, and the injured as heartily forgive; and there will thenceforth be a warmer, and purer, and holier flame of love cementing their hearts, because of the meekness, and gentleness of Christ, which each has seen in the other. As the little children of one family, who often in the course of the day look angrily, and feel soured toward one another, yet say, "Good night," with an affectionate kiss, and in the morning meet again in love; so should it be the care of the dear children of God, the members of the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, to love one another with a pure heart, fervently, and from the heart to forgive every one his brother their trespasses. On this point let every Christian prayerfully ponder the words of Jesus, recorded in Matt. xviii. especially his reply to the inquiry of Peter, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times! Jesus saith unto him, I say not until seven times, but until seventy times seven." And also what he hath said in Mark xi. 25, 26. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven, forgive your trespasses."

3. Another operation of brotherly love is *forbearance*. As the apostle writes to the Ephesian and Colossian brethren, "forbearing one another in love." The term here used is not limited in its signification to the more common acceptance of the English word, a withholding ourselves from injuring any one by the indulgence of anger and wrath: but it implies also, and more especially, *indulgence towards the infirmities of others*—a looking over their peculiarities of thought or manner, and not permitting them to prevent our endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, while they manifest an undoubted attachment to Christ and his cause.

There is much room for the exercise and cultivation of this grace in every Christian community. We are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. We have fellowship with God, and with his Son, and have communion in one Spirit. Yet there are diversities of gifts. Some are wise, and some are ignorant—some strong, and some weak—some babes, and some full grown men in Christ—some learning only the first principles of the oracles of God, and some going on unto perfection—some able to bear only milk, and some strong meat. Now they that are strong must bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please themselves; consulting the edification of their brother; and even sacrifice

their privilege for the sake of the conscientious scruples of weaker brethren.

This operation of brotherly love seems to bear directly on the point of intercourse with other churches. We severally, as denominations, believe ourselves to be *strong*, at least in reference to our system of truth. Let it then be granted, that we the Episcopalians, or we the Methodists, or we the Seceders, or we the Baptists, or we the Presbyterians, are the strong ones of the body of Christ, yet if we regard the others as belonging to the body at all, if we acknowledge them to be followers of Jesus, although we consider them weak in the faith, we are bound, as strong, to bear the infirmities of the weak; and in receiving them, to receive them not to doubtful disputations. And as the eye cannot say unto the hand, "I have no need of thee;" nor again, the head unto the feet, "I have no need of you," no more can we esteem of little account the least, the weakest of the disciples of Jesus Christ. And when we spread a table, whose "bread is the communion of the *body of Christ*," let us not spread it for Presbyterians, or Methodists, or Episcopalians, or any sect as such, but only as the table of the Lord, the place of communion for all who love him. And there may the weakest lamb of the flock go and feed on the pastures of Christ's love; and who shall venture to hinder him?

There are other things which call for forbearance. Constitutional temperament and providential circumstances have had an influence in throwing a variety of character into the church, all the grades of which are more or less modified by the renewing of the Spirit. Hence in many, of whom you cannot doubt that they are actuated by the love of God, the lustre of their piety is dimmed by some uncouthness of manner, some roughness of speech, some abruptness, or forwardness, or disagreeable talkativeness, or some whining and complaining disposition. These things have a tendency to create a dislike, or even disgust; and here we have need for the exercise of brotherly love, that we hide from our view these spots in God's children, and cover the multitude of sins, which might else disaffect us towards some of the most humble and prayerful of God's people. "Why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the *judgment seat of Christ*. Let us not therefore judge one another any more."

4. Another of its effects will be a *disposition to avoid rash judgments*. We are admonished to "speak the *truth in love*." "Charity, or love, rejoiceth in the truth, thinketh no evil, and hopeth all things." Were these sacred sentiments engraven on the hearts of the professed followers of Christ, how much of that precipitancy of judgment, which misconstrues language, and misinterprets actions, would be prevented in the brotherhood, and how much more nearly should we conform to the exhortation of the Apostle, "See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Such judging of the conduct of others is utterly inconsistent with the exercise of brotherly love, and the Christian spirit. Some there are, who are ever ready to attribute the actions of fellow Christians to improper motives, and viewing them unconnected with the concomitant circumstances, (some of which may be known only to the individual himself,) to denounce them as evidence of alienation from the life of God, and destitution of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. In consequence of this hasty prejudgment, the worst possible construction is also put on the remarks of others, and they are interpreted as personal, and deeply wounding to the friends and the cause of the Redeemer. It is especially inconsistent with this love, when small, unessential differences

of opinion in the explanation of scriptural facts, and consequent non-conformity in creed and discipline, are construed into rejection of the faith once delivered to the saints, and made the occasion of hard thoughts, and unkind, severe treatment.

5. Brotherly love will induce Christians to perform the *duty of admonition and reproof*. When we feel deeply and sincerely interested in any one as a friend, we naturally desire that all deformity of character shall be removed, and every thing lovely and of good report cultivated. And if there be the tie of kindness, we have an additional inducement to use our endeavors to this end, in view of the disgrace to the whole family resulting from the defection of any one. In the household of faith, each member of the family is intimately related to every other, and feels very sensibly when the Savior is wounded in the house of his friends. How should all, therefore, maintain a mutual watch, constantly exhort to a holy walk and conversation, and freely reprove manifest inconsistencies.

See what a *privilege* holy David esteemed the reproof of the righteous, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil." And mark what is said of this duty in the wisdom of the Proverbs: "He that refuseth reproof erreth, and he that heareth reproof getteth understanding, and shall be honored. Open rebuke is better than secret love: and faithful are the wounds of a friend."

While this is certainly an incumbent duty of every Christian, and an appropriate manifestation of brotherly love, much caution is requisite in the *manner* of its performance. The reprover must be clothed with humility, and evince no superciliousness, or sense of superiority. There must be nothing of the spirit which prompts to the sentiment, "Stand off, I am holier than thou," but the whole manner should prove to the offending brother or sister, that it springs from love, and that their good, and the interests of Christ's kingdom, are the motives which prompt the reproof. Thus, while administered and received in the spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus, the church will be kindly affectioned one to another, knit together in love, and growing up into that state in which she will be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

6. Brotherly love will also lead us to *bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*. The law of Christ is love. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Bearing one another's burdens, therefore, is a necessary effect of this love. Various burdens are laid upon the children of God. Some are exposed to the fiery darts of the wicked one, and almost ready, through unbelief, to sink in despair. Some walk in darkness and have no light. Some are the subjects of personal affliction, in pain all their days, and often prevented from mingling in the songs of Zion, and going up to the house where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, and enjoying the presence of the Spirit. Some are sorrowing for the loss of a dear relation, perhaps like Rachel, weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not. And others know the sad trial of ungodly wicked husbands, and dissipated, disobedient children, throwing a weight of grief upon their hearts, which none can appreciate, but those who experience it.

Now in all these, and other cases of anxious concern, and dark sorrow, the brethren have an interesting duty to perform, in administering consolation, in counseling, cheering, and applying the balm of Gilead. Oh! there is something wanting here in the church—something which,

shall so bind us together, that when one member suffers, all the members shall suffer with it; when any are in bonds, we shall be bound with them—something which shall bring us into closer union, and wake up within us a purer, more refined, more sensitive, more pervading sympathy, which shall be touched with the feeling of one another's infirmities, and vibrate to the chord of woe which is strung in a brother's heart. Then shall we show to the world, "how good, and how pleasant it is for Christian brethren to dwell together in unity," and then shall we bear each other's burdens, and fulfill the law of Christ, our heavenly Master.

7. This love will influence us to *regard the wants of the poorer brethren*. Perhaps in every church there are some, who, with all their industry and labor, are yet destitute; so that the *poor we have always with us*. Now whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, *how dwelleth the love of God in him?* And see, after the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the Spirit, how they *voluntarily sold* their possessions, and brought the price for distribution among the more indigent: and how it pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem. See also the labor of *love* which the Hebrews performed, in that they ministered to the saints; and how the Apostle exhorts all Christians—Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Hebrews, to make collections for the saints, distribute to their necessity, and *by love serve one another*.

And even if we look into the darker dispensation, we shall find the same operation of love towards those who were of the holy nation, the peculiar people, who were related in some sort as Christians. Lev. xxv. 35. "If thy brother be waxen poor, thou shalt relieve him. Thou shalt not give him thy money on usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase." Deut. xv. 7—11. "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thy hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need. And thy heart shall not be grieved, (shall not grudge, but be cheerful,) when thou givest unto him."

Whether then, we consider the requirements of the law of love under the Old Testament, or the frequent admonitions in reference to ministering to the saints in the New, or the practice of the primitive disciples of Christ, it seems to be a natural and necessary result of *loving as brethren*, that they who have received bountifully of the Lord, will remember his words; how he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

It would seem that in order to fulfill the requisitions of this love, there ought to be some method established, by which, either through the Pastor or other officers of the church, the richer might communicate of their goods, to the poorer of the household of faith.

8. Many more effects of brotherly love might be mentioned; as the cultivation of free religious conversation, abstinence from envious, suspicious feelings, from evil surmising, malicious construction of motives, tale-bearing, slandering, &c. &c.; but let it be observed finally, that if possessed of this affection, we shall *love those most, who have most of the spirit of Jesus*. From its very nature this will be the result. Were the affection originated by any internal relations, or dependent on any merely natural qualities, it might be otherwise. But since it is awakened by the image of Christ, and is in reality of the same nature with the love we bear to him, as the *elder Brother*, we must of necessity admire and esteem the other members of the family, in the proportion in which they are as-

simulated to him. He is supreme in excellence, and surpassing in manifestations of benevolence, and is therefore to be loved as the chief among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely; and his disciples will secure our confidence and affection in the degree in which they possess his loveliness.

Real brotherly love will find its objects in all classes, all colors, all climes, and all sects of evangelical Christians; and wherever it finds most of the spirit of Jesus, there will it flow out the most abundantly, and glow most fervently. It cannot be limited by any ecclesiastical, civil, or domestic connections, but extends to all in every place who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus as an atoning Savior. And as John was known as the disciple whom Jesus loved, probably because his spirit was most subdued, and his manners most softened by the heavenly influence of the Savior's precepts and practice, so now will they be most loved by the brotherhood, who evince the most complete conformity with the image of Christ.

REFLECTIONS.

1. This subject presents a *test of Christian character*. It is manifest from the frequency of its introduction in the gospel of Christ, and the epistles of the several Apostles, from the urgency with which it is pressed on the attention of the church, and from express declarations on this point, that it affords a satisfactory ground of decision as to our character and standing. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another." The exercise of love among the brethren, will even convince the world, that you possess the true spirit of the Redeemer. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him: but he that hateth his brother is in darkness." "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and *his love* is perfected in us." "If a man say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, *how can he love God* whom he hath not seen?" And we know that we have passed from death unto life, *because we love the brethren.*" These passages, evidently represent brotherly love as so important an exercise of the Christian, and so essentially of the spirit of the gospel, that any who are conscious of possessing it, may be certified of their interest in Christ, while they who are destitute of it, may be as fully assured of their impenitent, unconverted state.

If then the moral image of Jesus, wherever contemplated, awaken in our bosoms the emotion of love, and lead to its various operations—if that love arise not from natural affection, nor from the unsanctified amiable qualities of another, not from congeniality of temper, or circumstantial intimacy, nor from family or denominational relationship, but from the fact that the individual loved belongs to Christ, and possesses likeness to him, we may appropriate to ourselves all the consolation and peace, which evidence of an interest in the Redeemer is adapted to impart, and go onward, gratefully rejoicing in the Lord, and trusting in the God of our salvation.

2. *How great must be the happiness of heaven.* There love reigns in every breast. All the inhabitants are baptized with this holy feeling. There are they day and night before the throne of the God of love; with Jesus, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person: and of his fulness they all receive, and drink in everlasting draughts of love. There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. There is no clashing of interests, no selfishness, or pride, or

envy, or unhallowed ambition; no turmoil, or strife, or divisions; no discords; and no want of harmony in the lofty music of heaven. There all hearts beat in unison, and all its songs are songs of love. Its trees, are trees of life; its rivers, rivers of joy; its bowers, bowers of bliss; its air balmy with peace. Oh! what blissful regions those, where there is fullness of joy, and pleasures forevermore: where the God of love makes the brightest manifestations of his glory, holy angels worship with rapturous delight, and the church of the first-born unceasingly glow with fervent emotions of love.

"Love is the golden chain, that binds the happy souls above,
And he's an heir of heaven, who finds his bosom glow with love."

Whose aspirations do not reach after that dwelling-place of love, that holy, happy land, where there will be no more sin, no more curse, nor pain, nor sorrow, nor tears, nor death?

3. *How important to the world is the prevalence of the religion of Jesus Christ.* Its source is the fountain of purity—its tendency, the renovation of the heart, and consequent melioration of the human family—its aim, the perfection of man, and of society. It exhibits Jesus Christ as a model of excellence, and calls upon men every where for conformity with him in spirit and life. It inculcates universal benevolence, and its essence is love—love which operates in abstaining from anger, malice, blasphemy, evil communication, variance, emulations, wrath, strife; and in cultivating whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, as kindness, tenderness, forgiveness, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance. Oh! were the spirit of the gospel universally prevalent, were Christianity, with its pervading love, the system of individuals, communities, and nations, what a delightful world would this be! Then would men "beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and learn war no more. Violence should not be heard in the land, wasting nor destruction within our borders. The wolf also would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fating together, and a little child should lead them." Peace would cover the earth as a mantle, and joy unspeakable fill every bosom.

Men may talk of the perfectibility of human nature, and present, and try also their systems of philosophy, but all will be in vain without the transforming efficacy of the religion of Jesus. All other plans for the renovation of man, and the production of happiness, have successively and repeatedly failed: this only, where it has been brought to bear on human character, has effected a thorough and permanent change, converting the lion into the lamb, and diffusing through society holy and peaceful principles of action. Let the whole world then be brought to feel its power, and it will be a world of love, even as the New Jerusalem coming down from God, out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband. Let the church only walk forth in the beauty and purity of her heavenly attire, and the world will admire, and be attracted to follow in her train. Let the children of the celestial King walk worthy of their elevated rank, let them stand forth as "the epistles of Christ, read and known of all men," and they may convincingly prove to the world that Christianity is its best boon, and that to embrace it will convert the wilderness into the garden of the Lord, imparting beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and diffusing through all the relations of society such heavenly influences, as clearly to evince the supreme blessedness of that people whose God is the Lord, whose religion the Bible. AMEN.

SERMON CLXII.

BY REV. ANSEL NASH,
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UNION AMONG CHRISTIANS.

I CORINTHIANS i. 10.—*Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.*

In the harmony and mutual affection here recommended, is implied agreement in sentiment, in feeling, and in objects of pursuit. When saints are entreated that they all speak the same things, and that there be no divisions among them, it must be intended that they should embrace substantially the same views of the doctrines of revelation. When they are likewise entreated to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, the meaning is, that they should be united in their affections, as well as in their views of revealed truth. The essential basis of all union is agreement in sentiment. Without this, what harmony can exist? How can two walk together except they be agreed? What concord can be expected among men while at variance as to essential truths, fundamental principles? Diversity of opinion naturally begets alienation of feeling. But will it be pretended, that it is too much to require of different individuals, that they embrace essentially the same religious sentiments? If all are to derive instruction from the same source, are to draw their opinions from the infallible book of God, and if all will come to the study of this book with honest, humble minds, can there be any necessity for their adopting materially different views? Clearly no other necessity of this kind can exist, except what arises from the temper of mind with which the oracles of God are perused. Since the vision is written and made plain, it must be capable of being understood; and if men attend to it with right feelings they must understand it in substantially the same manner.

It is, however, often asserted, men think differently on all other subjects, and hence they cannot be expected to think alike on the subject of religion. What pertinency and justness soever may be attached to this assertion, it should be ever kept in mind, that religion is the only subject, respecting which we are furnished with a fixed, infallible standard of faith. Men on other subjects are left to the guidance of unassisted reason, and are at liberty to think as seems right in their own eyes; but on this they are required to make the word of God their invariable guide, both as to belief and practice. Beyond all question they who study the inspired volume with honest minds, with sincere desires to know what it teaches, must learn from it essentially the same things. Can it then be unreasonable to require of saints, that they harmonize in their religious opinions? So far as they suffer themselves to be guided simply by reason, the hope of their agreement must be abandoned, for that which appears reasonable to one mind may appear very differently to another. But when God condescends to speak to men in language adapted to their

capacity, what room is left for essential diversity of religious opinion?

In putting their construction on this language, different individuals doubtless may, consistently with rectitude of heart, ascribe to it somewhat different shades of meaning. Probably it is in vain to hope for the entire removal of liability to this, till they shall be raised to regions of clearer light and greater moral purity. In this view of the matter we find ample cause for humiliation and regret, but no cause for alienation of feeling.

But saints are required to show themselves united not in sentiment and affection only, but likewise in objects of pursuit. They are bound to be helpers of each other's joy. For their mutual edification, their growth in grace, their preparation for the heavenly state, they should manifest deep concern. It should be seen that they regard one another as engaged in the same good cause; as members of the same spiritual body; as aiming at the same great and momentous results. Every individual saint should feel deeply, and should make the feeling manifest, that what affects the spiritual community to which he belongs affects himself. If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. If one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.

The reasons why such harmony should be cherished, are obvious and abundant. Every view which can be taken of the people of God—their character, their relation to the Creator, and to one another, their condition and their prospects, their connection with this world and the next—shows that there should be no divisions among them, but that they should be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

For every spiritual blessing they are all indebted to the same grace, and in them all this grace has performed the same work—having renewed their hearts into the image of God—having brought them up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set their feet upon a rock, and put a new song in their mouth, even praise to the living God—having caused them to sit together in heavenly places in Christ. Should not an impression of the manifold spiritual blessings, in which they are common sharers, serve to bind their hearts together in love? O my brethren, had not the grace of God interposed in your behalf, where had you now been? If you have just views of what this has done for you, how kind and affectionate must be your feelings towards them who have derived from the same source the consolations and joys which you experience.

But all saints sustain the same relation to the Most High. They have been born of God. From being dead in trespasses and sins, they have by him been quickened to spiritual life. On him do they likewise depend for the support of that life. Of his fullness do they all receive, and grace for grace. To their heavenly Father are they all united by bonds of affection stronger than death. Begotten of God, all having their life sustained by the same gracious influences, and constituting one spiritual family, shall they be separated from each other by mutual alienations and jealousies? Is not here an irresistible reason why they should love one another with a pure heart? O, how can they who sustain so important, so endearing a relation to one common Father in heaven, ever indulge feelings of party spirit and of mutual aversion?

The people of God, moreover, are subject to the same trials, the same enjoyments, the same hopes. They are all compassed about with infirmities, and all beset with sins. They are alike concerned in a conflict with spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Hence they all have the same need of that spiritual armor which the gospel furnishes. None of them can feel too strongly, that all their springs are in God; that if his protection and grace are withdrawn, they shall at once stum-

ble, and fall, and be broken. But to them all, the same spiritual, heavenly influences are granted, to raise their souls above the world, to fill them with joy and peace in believing, to afford them an earnest of eternal rest. Saints may come together before their Father's throne, to make known their cares and griefs, to look to him for grace to help in every time of need. How unspeakable the privilege in which they are thus permitted to share.

They all have besides the most cheering and glorious hopes. Relying on the promise and grace of God, they expect in due time to return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads. When all trials shall be past, and temptation and sin shall have come to an end; when the storms of life shall be over, then are they to rest together in the world where there is no more sin—no more separation. Before their Maker's throne they are to be the subjects of a union immensely more intimate, more endearing, more joyful than any ever known among mortals. My brethren, how precious, how cheering, how glorious that hope of the Christian, in which all this is embraced! What object is worthy of a moment's comparison with the future inheritance of those who are allowed to say, For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens? How impressively does this view of the present condition and the prospects of saints show that they should all speak the same thing, that there should be no divisions among them! Have they now the same trials, the same supports and enjoyments? are they to spend eternity in perfect and blissful harmony?—then how ill does division and contention become them; how obvious that they should be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment.

Saints should maintain the harmony and mutual affection inculcated in our text, from regard to their own spiritual good, and the interests of the cause to which they are attached. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! Let the members of the Savior's household be knit together in love; let them keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and how immensely must it contribute to their mutual edification and growth in grace. Let them maintain harmony of sentiment, let the law of kindness towards each other dwell in their hearts, let them in all things love as brethren, and how effectually must it contribute to their perfection in holiness and comfort. How much by these means may they do to alleviate their mutual burdens; how much to render them helpers of one another's joy. In this manner is the happiness of heaven in a measure brought down to earth, and the church below made to resemble the church above.

But not only does the temper which our text inculcates bring with it spiritual satisfaction and peace; it also contributes much to procure the influences of the Holy Spirit. This blessed agent delights to dwell in that religious community, the members of which all speak the same things, and suffer no divisions among them. They are prepared to cherish his operations. By them the power of sin is overcome, and their minds are led to holiness and to God. Contrast these things with what you may witness where an opposite spirit prevails—where diverse opinions respecting the doctrines of revelation are cherished, and these occasion debate, and debate produces strife, and this is marked by an unkind spirit, more solicitous for victory than for truth, and the community which ought to be bound together by cords of love, is arrayed in hostile parties. Can large measures of the renewing and sanctifying influences of the divine Spirit be expected under such circumstances? I will not presume to limit the power or the grace of Zion's

King. I know that the residue of the Spirit is with him; that his ways are above those of men, as the heavens are above the earth; that he can perform the most splendid works of mercy where creatures would least expect it; but I also know, that if he do vouchsafe the special tokens of his presence and love, under circumstances such as I have described, it is a departure from the ordinary mode of his dealings with men. How often, may we well believe, that the God of mercy has withheld the life-giving influences of his Spirit, or has withdrawn them, because his people have not been perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. In how many instances have they who love the Lord Jesus Christ, deprived themselves of blessings beyond all price, by not keeping the new commandment which he has given them. Doubtless, multitudes there are, who, from this cause, will be less holy and less happy to all eternity.

From the same cause, too, will multitudes fail of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and be forever excluded from the abodes of the blessed. If diversity of opinion, and the spirit of contention, which it so often produces, prevent the special operations of the divine Spirit, how fatal are they to the prosperity of that cause, for which the Savior died; the advancement of which secures the salvation of men and the glory of God. My hearers may complain, that I deal in mere common-place remark, when I assert, we can have no hope that this cause will be advanced, or the souls of men be saved, without special Divine influence. But though this truth is familiar and trite, is there not danger that it may be practically overlooked? We know full well that the Holy Ghost possesses almighty power; still it may escape our minds, that he is easily grieved; that even men while utterly unable to imitate his operations, can cause him to abandon forever an ungrateful people. Let this once be done, and where could be the hope, that ever another sinner among them would be renewed and saved? But if the people of God are liable to that which may be followed by consequences so deplorable, how ought they to guard their conduct; how should they fear and tremble in view of the responsibility which attends their doings. Are the effects of dissensions and jealousies among saints to be told in eternity in tears and groans, as the smoke of their torment, whom these dissensions are the means of destroying, ascendeth up forever and ever; then who that is a saint would not be most anxious to avoid them?

Our subject also demands consideration in another view. According to Jehovah's plan of administration, his designs of mercy towards this lost world are to be accomplished *by means*. We are not to expect his purposes of grace in behalf of men to be put in execution merely by his own direct efficiency. To this end the united efforts of his peculiar friends are indispensable. Every rational hope, that the cause of truth and righteousness will be sustained, that it will ultimately triumph, depends, under God, on the human instrumentality to be employed in its behalf. The efforts of creatures must indeed be approved of God, and all their success be from his blessing. Still, according to divine appointment, these efforts must be made, or nothing will be accomplished. In order that they may be made with encouraging prospects, the people of God must cultivate harmony and mutual affection. To expect men to act in concert and with efficiency, unless substantially agreed in sentiment and feeling, is contrary to all experience. But who can doubt whether there is eminent need of such action in all the friends of God? The interests of the Redeemer's kingdom have always been subject to the hostility of powerful enemies seen and unseen. With them it is a fixed, leading object, to divide its friends, that thus they may destroy their

influence, and effect their own malignant designs. How forcible the reason thus furnished for all who love God to be one in sentiment, in feeling, in action. Let them be otherwise, and who can estimate the injury to those interests which they hold dear? Only by means of united zeal, and effort, and sacrifices, and prayers, can the enemies of the cross be subdued, the salvation of the gospel be diffused through the earth, and our lost race redeemed from the thralldom of sin.

The only effectual *means* of fully maintaining the harmony and mutual affection which are of so great importance, is *the increase of knowledge and piety in the people of God*. Ignorance has always been a fruitful source of error and contention. The man who has only superficial views of revealed truth, and is satisfied with such views, is peculiarly exposed to the influence of passion and prejudice. How can he arrive at correct conclusions, while thus unprepared to appreciate the considerations opposed to his present views? Within the limited range of his thoughts he finds nothing to evince the fallacy of his reasonings. But let his mind occupy a wider compass, let him give its proper weight to every thing which has a bearing on the subjects presented to his thoughts—he may then perhaps perceive that his conclusions are altogether fallacious. Ignorance occasions men not to reject only, but also to denounce and abhor the sentiments of others without examination. The follower of Christ who has never been accustomed to think deeply, but has adopted his religious opinions chiefly on the credit of others, is peculiarly liable to demand that all come to his standard. From this source what divisions, and angry disputes, and bitter denunciations have many times sprung, to the disgrace of the Christian name. Hence, party has been arrayed against party, and brother has called brother heretic, where perhaps more intellectual light was all which was needed to evince that both were in the wrong.

One thing, then, requisite to remove evils of this kind, is that thorough, accurate acquaintance with *the word of God*, which is acquired only by diligent attention to it, united with humble, earnest prayer. If we would have harmony and brotherly love, the teachers of religion must never go themselves, nor send their hearers to *human philosophy* to learn what they are to believe in relation to the great and mysterious subjects of religion. It is matter of everlasting gratitude to God, that he has sent down to this dark world a light to guide us in the ways of truth and peace. If we come at a full and correct understanding of the documents from which this light is reflected, then we may be sure that we know all that is here to be known respecting the subjects to which they relate. From the history of past ages, not less than from observation of our own times, is derived full and melancholy evidence, that all attempts *to be wise above what is written* are worse than useless. How fruitful a source of disputes and divisions have been attempts of this nature! Would we see the whole church of the same mind and of the same judgment, our first endeavor should be to awaken in all its members a resolution to labor, with diligence and prayer, for understanding the holy Scriptures. In this undertaking every individual should be willing to confine his inquiries within the limits which God has prescribed—always remembering that secret things belong unto the Lord our God, and only *those which are revealed* belong unto us and to our children.

But in order that the harmony and mutual affection, so much to be desired, may become universal in the church, not only must religious knowledge be increased; *the standard of piety* must also be elevated. Christians must become more spiritual; their affections must be more holy. They must pray more. They must have more faith and more

love. Their minds must be more exalted, more detached from the world; they must be more desirous of their Maker's glory, and less concerned for their own. Those disorderly, wicked passions which are the origin of divisions, contentions and numberless evils, must be subdued, and in their place must be love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, which are the fruit of the Spirit, and against which there is no law. O when will saints be more like their divine Master and Lord, united in sentiment and feeling; kind and affectionate to one another, and disposed to co-operate in every good work! When will they exhibit the meekness and gentleness of Christ, sitting at his feet, receiving his instructions with implicit credence, divested of that pride which produces a wicked anxiety to be the greatest, which is an endless source of envy, jealousy and rivalry; which is most hateful to God and tormenting to its possessor? Then will the gospel appear in far greater simplicity and glory than before; the system of truth which it reveals, will be divested of many things which men have attached to it, heavenly influences continually descending, will make glad the city of our God, and earth will exhibit a resemblance of the light, and harmony, and peace, and joy which fill the world of glory.

Would you who are called saints do what is in your power to hasten the time when all this shall be experienced? then take heed that you imbibe and put in practice the principles and the spirit taught and enjoined in our text. Let your conduct towards one another be such that it may be said of you as heathen men said of Christ's disciples in primitive times, "See how these Christians love one another." Let all who love the Lord Jesus adopt this course—humbling themselves for past deficiency, and how blessed would be the consequences. The mouth of gainsayers would be put to silence; the church would appear in new beauty and glory; the influences of the divine Spirit would descend powerfully on the minds of men, and speedily would be verified the prediction, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the depths of the sea." My brethren, how much is such a consummation to be desired and to be sought? How closely connected is it with the glory of God and the dearest interests and hopes of the human family? Then with what solicitude should the followers of Christ cultivate that union with one another which leads to it; how anxiously avoid every thing of an opposite nature?

If I have rightly marked "the signs of the times," this is eminently a period, in which the friends of the Redeemer should all speak the same thing, and there should be no divisions among them, but they should be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Many things now passing before our eyes indicate most plainly that the world is fast approaching some great moral revolution. The church is beginning to rouse from her slumbers; the systems of false religion, which have been so widely diffused are beginning to lose their influence over the minds of men. A spirit of free inquiry has gone abroad among the nations. Errors in opinion and in practice do likewise extensively prevail. Infidels of every name, and transgressors of every grade, are seen combining with determined hostility against the Savior—against his truth and his cause. How impressive the argument hence arising for unity of feeling and action in the friends of Christ? Will their love to Him who has purchased them with blood, allow them to waste in mutual contention the strength which they ought to array against the common enemy? In such a day as this, when the cause of truth is assailed from so many quarters, and the united efforts of its friends against the virulence of its enemies, are so much needed, will they suffer themselves to impair their

own influence by dissension, by mutual distrust and jealousy? Instead of coming, in the spirit of harmony and brotherly love, to the help of the Lord, shall they misrepresent, and disparage, and reproach one another? Shall they waste their time on questions of doubtful solution—points of a merely philosophical character, respecting which the Holy Ghost has not deigned to teach us?

The people of God in this country ought to consider these sentiments as applying to themselves, in all their force. To every enlightened friend of the Redeemer it must be most interesting and delightful to contemplate what God has done for the church in this western world, and the high destiny to which she seems to be called. To American Christians it is believed is assigned, in the purposes of heaven, much of the honor of that moral renovation of the human family, which is ere long to be experienced. A little less than a century since, the immortal Edwards employed his mighty mind, in attempting to show the probability that the millenium would commence in our country. Whether or not this opinion is well founded, there can be no doubt that Christians in America may have a share in the high honor of diffusing the blessings of that happy period throughout the globe. It is a momentous question—one which ought to come home to every heart that feels the love of God—whether their share in this honor shall be great or small. One or the other it will unquestionably be, very much in proportion as they are influenced by the instruction and the spirit of our text. Could I raise my feeble voice to a note which might be heard throughout the length and breadth of the land, I would urge on every saint, that love to all the household of faith, by which the Savior has taught us that his disciples shall be known; I would say to him, Brother, as you love the Savior, as you desire to see his glories spread around the world, and the souls of men redeemed from hell, take heed that, whenever you meet an individual bearing his image, by what name soever he may be called, you embrace him in the arms of Christian affection, and be ready to co-operate with him in every good work. Too long has the church crippled her own energies, and retarded her growth, by mutual dissension and the spirit of party. As the brightness of a more glorious day begins to dawn upon her, O let this spirit cease, and its place be occupied by that love which seeketh not her own.

That all who constitute the visible family of Christ, should at present be united in one denomination, is neither to be expected nor desired. This would be a wide departure from the natural result of that freedom of opinion, which so happily exists in our country. It surely can be no cause of surprise nor of grief, that among men of truly devout minds there should be diversities of opinion on unessential points of doctrine and practice. Nor is it to be lamented, that these diversities have led to the organization of the community of the faithful under different names. But at this day, so interesting, so auspicious to the best interests of man, and in this country, so favored of heaven, so richly furnished with means of blessing the whole human family, let none of these things produce dissension, distrust, or alienation among the people of God. This shall be our prayer. And as the chariot of salvation rolls onward, and its motion is more and more accelerated by the breath of the Spirit, we believe the time is fast drawing near, when Ephraim shall no longer envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim; when there shall be one Lord, and his name one; and when in all God's holy mountain there shall be nothing to hurt or destroy. AMEN.